

# The Daily Star

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## Ensuring Safe Drinking Water for All

### **Bangladesh lags behind most S Asian countries**

#### Shows international report

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With 83 percent of the people having access to safe drinking water, Bangladesh is lagging behind all of its South Asian neighbours except Afghanistan, reveals an international report.

Even the global average of people's access to safe drinking water, which is 89 percent, is higher than Bangladesh's, though plenty of water flows down to the sea through the country's river systems and causes flooding, says the Water for Human Development report.

The report, launched yesterday, also shows that Bangladesh has ensured only 55 percent of its people's access to basic sanitation till 2011, while the Maldives ensured basic sanitation for 98 percent of its people and Sri Lanka for 91 percent.

Institute of Governance Studies (IGS) of Brac University organised the launching ceremony of the report published by Pakistan-based organization Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre as part of its Human Development in South Asia 2013 series.

Slow progress in this sector would bar the country from attaining the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) about reversing environment and biodiversity losses, if half the population does not have access to safe drinking water by 2015, said speakers.

Prof Nazrul Islam, former chairman of the University Grants Commission (UGC), was present as chief guest, while Prof Ainun Nishat, vice chancellor of Brac University, chaired the session. "Though thousands of slum dwellers do not have access to drinking water, the rich waste plenty of drinkable water washing their cars in Dhaka city," said Prof Nazrul.

The successive governments were not serious about implementing water related laws and policies, and this is putting the country behind, he added.

Presenting a comparison of South Asian countries' achievement in attaining that MDG, Dr Debapriya Bhattachariya, distinguished fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue, said Bangladesh could achieve more, as there were two more years to go.

Dr Sultan Haveez Rahman, executive director of IGS, delivered the welcome speech, while M Syeduzzaman, former finance minister; ANM Nasir Uddin, former secretary, Ministry of Health; Kamrun Nahar Khanam, additional secretary, Ministry of Water Resources; and M Azaharul Haq, former managing director, Wasa, also spoke.